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## Enabling special needs students to succeed through whole language strategies

Patricia E. Moran

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California State University  
San Bernardino

ENABLING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS  
TO SUCCEED  
THROUGH WHOLE LANGUAGE STRATEGIES

A Project Proposal Submitted to

The Faculty of the School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the

Degree of  
Master of Arts

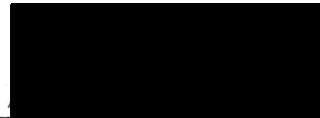
In  
Education: Reading Option

By

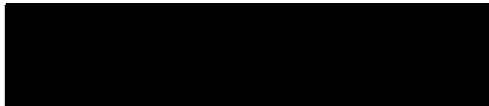
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## Summary

Whole language instruction provides special educators with an opportunity to undo some of negative effects of meaningless language instruction. Through whole language teaching, students realize that they are already successful language users and that reading and writing are just other ways that they can use language to communicate with others.

As I have taught children with learning difficulties for eight years, I have seen the ill effects that fragmented and irrelevant language instruction has had on my students. It is time special educators examine and possibly remediate our reading programs rather than trying to remediate our students.

In this project, I have developed a handbook for primary special education teachers that will introduce them to whole language teaching and demonstrate its positive and powerful effects with special needs children. By integrating literature and whole language strategies, I will illustrate how whole language instruction is a philosophy of teaching rather than a methodology of teaching.

This handbook is intended to provide special education teachers with strategies in the areas of



reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing that they can readily implement in their classrooms based on this philosophy. It emphasizes how reading and writing are interconnected and how special needs children learn to read by writing and write by reading as do all children.

## Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to my mother, Kathryn B. Moran, and my friend, Randy Schutz, whose support made it all possible.

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## Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The following thoughts are representative of the concerns that are commonly heard and expressed in education today. Teaching reading from a whole language approach may be successful with regular students, but it will not work for children with special needs. Students with learning difficulties need concepts and skills broken down into smaller chunks of information in order for them to understand and learn the curriculum. Can students with learning disabilities learn how to read if they don't understand phonics? These sentiments strongly indicate that just as the philosophy of whole language teaching encourages our students to take risks, we as special educators have to be willing to take risks.

The thought that students with special needs will not learn through a whole language curriculum model is one of the many myths that currently exists in regards to whole language. Fortunately, the amount of documented research which negates this myth is continuously growing. Newman and Church (1990) clearly state that

Children having difficulty in school for whatever reason are the very ones who benefit most from a learning context that encourages them to take

risks and to experiment. For so many of these children their problems have been exacerbated by the fragmented, right answer skills-based literacy instruction they've been receiving. The instruction, rather than helping them sort out what reading and writing are all about, has interfered with their strategies for making sense, rendering them dependent, cautious learners. Many of these children have stopped believing they can learn. A whole language-based learning environment invites these children to see themselves as learners once again (p. 23).

In the past, special educators have often used a task analysis approach to simplify reading and writing by breaking down the tasks into smaller subskills. In doing this, we were giving the children more practice in skills and activities in which they had already experienced failure. Breaking down written language into fragmented bits and pieces often leads learning disabled students to believe that learning to read and write lacks real purpose and meaning (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988).

Today, some educators (e.g., Graves, 1985; Carbo, 1987; Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1988) are beginning to look at our teaching practices in relation to learning

disabled students from a different perspective.

Hollingsworth & Reutzel (1988) propose that perhaps students who are thought to be language-learning disabled may not be in actuality. Rather, they may be students who have had a difficult time making sense out of an educational system that has separated the learning of reading and writing from their real and functional use in society (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988).

According to Goodman (1986), "Language learning is easy when it's whole, real, and relevant; when it makes sense and it is functional; when it's encountered in the context of its use; when the learner chooses to use it" (p.26).

After teaching children who have learning difficulties for eight years, I have seen the effects of meaningless and irrelevant language instruction. I have observed my students struggling to make sense out of reading instruction that consisted solely of decoding words and/or learning isolated skills. Even when they appear to master the skills, their ability to transfer this knowledge to language in meaningful contexts is extremely limited. They are unable to make meaningful connections to real language, because there are no meaningful connections with such isolated and controlled instruction.

There are three distinct curriculum models that exist within the field of reading instruction. On one side of the continuum there is the phonics model. The phonics approach to reading is based on the philosophy that language is learned from part to whole. It consists of teaching children phonetic rules that they can then apply to unknown words in order to decode and understand them. For students who struggle with the sound/symbol relationships and who are exposed to this model alone, learning to read becomes laborious and unenjoyable.

In the center of the reading curriculum continuum, there is the skills model. This approach is also based on the philosophy that language is learned from part to whole, but it is learned as a set of discrete skills. In the skills model, students are taught a hierarchy of isolated skills in vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. It consists of reading stories containing controlled vocabulary and completing repetitious worksheets which are meaningless to the students.

On the far side of the reading continuum there is the whole language model. In this model, the purpose of language and learning how to read is to obtain meaning. It is based on the philosophy that language is learned

as a process of communication. Through a whole language approach a child learns how to read by learning how to combine all three cue systems of language--graphophonemic-sound/symbol relationship, syntactic-grammar, and semantic-meaning--in order to obtain meaning from print. In a whole language curriculum model, students are taught strategies that demonstrate how they can predict, confirm, self-correct, and integrate knowledge in order to enhance their comprehension.

Whole language instruction builds on a child's strengths instead of concentrating on her deficits. This is why teaching whole language to students with special needs is so powerful. Now these children can begin to feel successful and begin to enjoy reading perhaps for the first time.

Often times, children with learning difficulties approach their learning environment already feeling like failures due to past experiences. The whole language approach to teaching offers special educators an opportunity to help their students realize that they are already successful at using language and that reading and writing are just other ways they can use this language to communicate with others. Hollingsworth & Reutzel (1988) believe that "The solution to the problem



for many learning disabled children is to put language together again for the LD learner and help him rediscover the meaningful relationships that exist in our language" (p. 487).

In accordance with the idea that language needs to be meaningful, children need to see themselves reflected in the literature they read. Therefore, the literature presented to our students needs to be culturally diverse. It is no longer acceptable to present one cultural perspective. Multi-cultural literature needs to be an integral part of our curriculum.

In this project, I propose to develop a handbook for primary special education teachers that will introduce them to whole language teaching and demonstrate its positive and powerful effects with special needs children. By integrating literature and whole language strategies, I will illustrate how whole language instruction is a philosophy of teaching rather than a methodology of teaching.

This handbook is intended to provide special education teachers with strategies in the areas of reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing that they can readily implement in their classrooms based on this philosophy. It will emphasize how reading and writing are interconnected and how special needs

children learn to read by writing and write by reading as do all children.

My goal in developing this handbook is to help special educators understand the philosophy of whole language, so they will begin to feel more comfortable implementing it into their own classrooms. In addition, I hope it encourages them to pursue acquiring further knowledge about whole language and the whole language resources that are available to assist them in making such a philosophical transition in their teaching.

## Review of Literature

The greatest fear special educators have is that learning disabled children will not learn to read in a whole language program. Like many regular educators, they perceive whole language as a method of teaching children to read rather than a philosophy of teaching. Some believe that it may be beneficial for "regular" students but that our students need information and instruction broken down into small segments in order to be understood and learned. They cling to the myth that "small is easy" and to the belief that without isolated phonics instruction, learning disabled children will not learn to read (Malicky & Norman, 1988).

There are other special educators who think that exploring and experimenting with various reading methods is the key to helping special needs students. Such educators believe that the teacher just has to find the right method, and then children with learning difficulties will learn how to read.

When a child has difficulty learning to read, educators often assume it is because there is something innately wrong with the child (Goodman, 1986). Fortunately, there is research being published that negates all these previous assumptions by revealing how special needs children are learning to read through

whole language instruction and are beginning to feel better about themselves as a result of being successful readers.

Proponents of a whole language perspective totally oppose the thought that reading failure is due to something innately wrong with the child. Goodman (1986) states that "Language learning is not difficult. If young humans haven't succeeded in becoming literate in school, something must be wrong with the program: it needs remediation, not they" (p. 55).

It is time educators take a serious look at the approaches used to teach reading and how these approaches are affecting our students. Do certain students truly have learning difficulties or have our previous programs failed these students?

#### Holistic versus Fragmented Skills

Goodman (1986) indicates that language learning is difficult when it's broken into bits and pieces but easy when it's whole. When instruction and information are fragmented, the learning disabled child begins to view reading and writing as lacking real purpose. In turn, the process of learning to read and write becomes more abstract and complex (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988). Focusing on parts versus the whole often makes learning more difficult for these children rather than less

difficult. In such an environment, so much time is dedicated to specific skill development that there is little time left for actual reading and writing (Mallicky & Norman, 1988). I found this to be very true when I taught from a skills approach. I was often frustrated with the short amount of time we actually spent reading stories and real literature. Smith (1978, cited in Feldman) states that "If the purpose of reading is comprehension or to gain meaning from print, then research and/or instruction directed at the isolated skills elements may have little, if any impact on the ultimate objectives of reading instruction" (p. 3-4).

Graves (1985) believes that when children with learning disabilities work on a skill in isolation, they do not see this activity as a means to show what they know. "Skills work merely supplies additional evidence for the misconception that they are less intelligent than other children" (Graves, 1985, p. 37). Furthermore, Allington (1987) strongly believes that the skills approach is at least partially responsible for the lack of progress students have made in remedial reading programs.

On the contrary, research has shown that learning disabled children learn best when they are actively involved in interesting and functionally relevant

language-learning opportunities (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988). Based on my personal experience with teaching these children for eight years, I totally agree that it is vital for learning disabled children to see the relevancy of what they are learning in order for them to be able to make connections. Malicky and Norman (1988) specifically state that "Reading and writing need to be integrated into their world through meaningful, relevant, purposeful literacy activities" (p. 23). Whole language instruction provides such opportunities for all children. As time progresses, more and more educators are beginning to agree with the following quote, "Children learn language by using it. They learn to speak by speaking, to write by writing, and to read by reading--but more importantly, they gain significant knowledge from any one of these experiences, which extends to all the others" (Homan, Karl, Vega, & Edgecomb, 1990, p. 17).

By its very nature, whole language can help alleviate some of the difficulties special needs children bring to the learning situation. For children who have memory and cognitive problems, the thematic approach to teaching helps them learn more effectively, because the information is integrated and thus becomes more meaningful and easier to retain. For children who

have emotional difficulties that interfere with their learning, a whole language program can be therapeutic, because it tends to relieve some of their anxiety and removes their block to reading (Brand, 1989).

#### Reading Styles and Self-Esteem

Some educators believe that it is significant to consider a child's reading style when deciding instruction (Carbo, 1986). When interviewed and observed, many poor readers have exhibited global, tactile, and kinesthetic reading styles. When the method of teaching reading accommodates such children's strengths, they make a great deal of progress. Since children with global reading styles are whole-to-part learners, they benefit most from a holistic approach. Students with global and visual styles do not benefit from phonics instruction. Rather, they need reading programs that focus on meaning and comprehension. When these children do not receive instruction that compliments their reading style, boredom, lowered self-esteem, and aversion to reading, and behavior problems often result (Carbo, 1987).

Out of the estimated 20% of children that are currently thought to be "learning disabled", Margaret Phinney (1988) believes only two to four percent are truly disabled children, "Children with a processing

style so different that learning to read is a slow, difficult task no matter how it's approached" (p. 113). She refers to these children as global learners. Phinney believes the rest of the troubled readers have difficulties due to physical, emotional or maturational factors, or because of inappropriate instruction or expectations (Phinney, 1988).

Many of the recommendations for teaching global learners parallel the philosophy and strategies of a whole language program. For example, researchers suggest building on and teaching to the child's strengths and informing her as to what is observed about her reading style. Carbo (1987) states "When students understand their own reading styles and are given opportunities to learn through their reading style strengths, they tend to feel respected, valued, and empowered. Those feelings generally translate into higher achievement and fewer disciplinary problems" (p. 200).

In addition, educators stress using well-written, interesting reading materials and engaging children in the selection process. They also encourage using a variety of strategies such as: reading a story in unison, listening to read-alongs, and having students write and illustrate their own stories, etc. (Carbo,



1987).

Whole language enhances a learning disabled child's self-esteem, because it is based on the premise that each child has something worthwhile to communicate, and it accepts her language style at any given time. The child suddenly feels successful and is in turn more willing to try again (Brand, 1989). Shirley Brand (1989) states that "Several studies have shown significant positive correlations between success in school and the belief that one's own action can control what happens" (pgs. 307-308). Thus, since whole language is self-directed, the child begins to gain a sense of control over her own life (Goodman, 1986).

One specific example of a whole language program that increases a student's self-esteem is one known as RATE: Read and Then Evaluate. Piloted in an elementary school in Maryland, RATE is a program in which learning disabled students self-select library books at their reading level, read the books, and then evaluate them for the rest of the school. This program provides learning disabled students with an additional purpose for reading. In addition, the students' self-esteems were increased, because they were comfortable reading at their level knowing they were doing a service for the primary grade children and teachers. Many of the

students became critical readers, and even nonreaders began to pick up books (Jamison & Shevitz, 1985).

If we as special educators want to provide successful reading opportunities for our students, it is important that we realize the roles which learning styles and self-esteem have in the process of teaching our students how to read. We must acknowledge our students strengths and build upon them. Whole language instruction is based on this premise. By providing a curriculum that compliments the students' reading styles, the students soon become successful learners, and in turn, begin to feel better about themselves.

#### Reading Fluency

Despite the fact that there isn't a great deal of research currently available to support the thought that as a student's oral fluency increases, her comprehension will also improve, some studies have found a direct correlation between these two aspects of the reading process (Samuels, 1979; Dowhower, 1987;1989).

Therefore, I think it is noteworthy to discuss several holistic approaches that have been proven successful at improving the reading fluency of special needs students. Holistic is the key here, because it refers to reading instruction that is primarily focused on whole texts or

large chunks of written discourse which is in accordance with the philosophy of whole language (Rasinski, 1989).

One of the best documented holistic approaches to improving reading fluency is that of repeated readings (Rasinski, 1989; Henk, Helfeldt, & Platt, 1986; Herman, 1985). As the name suggests, a student rereads a passage until a criterion level of mastery is achieved (Rasinski, 1989). One benefit of this method is that it expands the total number of words a student can recognize instantaneously (Henk et al., 1986). Other researchers believe that achieving this automaticity in turn frees the student's attention so she can concentrate on comprehension (Dahl, 1974; Samuels, 1979). In her study, Herman (1985) states that "By the end of the period of repeated readings, the speed and accuracy with which a story was read indicated that the lower levels of processing were improved" (p. 562). In addition, existing literature supports the finding that the increase in this automatic sight word knowledge does transfer to the other passages outside of the ones practiced (Henk et al., 1986).

Another holistic technique that is used to help improve the reading fluency of students with reading difficulties is one known as imitative reading. This technique is especially helpful when working with

students with serious reading problems. Imitative reading consists of the teacher reading a segment of the text aloud while the student is following along silently. When the teacher has completed the passage, the student attempts to echo what the teacher has said (Henk et al., 1986; Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988).

In addition, a method that is used when students' word recognition abilities are severely restricted is one known as the taped readings approach. The students are given both a written and taped version of a particular text. They are then told to read the text while listening to the tape until they can read the text on their own. Several studies reported that children who had had minimal success at learning to read previously, made significant gains as a result of listening to these taped readings (Rasinski, 1989).

Radio reading is yet another technique used to improve students' reading fluency. One particular asset of this approach for learning disabled students is that it occurs in a group setting which eliminates an individual's embarrassment due to her limited reading ability. Each child has a "script" which she reads aloud to the rest of the group pretending she is the broadcaster. However, the reader and the teacher are the only two people who have copies of the script.

Therefore, if the student makes minor word recognition errors, but the story still makes sense, no one will know the difference. The students do practice reading the text ahead of time either to themselves or to the teacher. At this time, emphasis is placed first on the meaning of the story so that the student can paraphrase the parts that may be difficult for her when reading aloud (Henk et al., 1986).

#### Reading and Writing Connection

As with students in regular education, research supports the importance of incorporating writing into the special needs child's reading program (Dobson, 1985). Reading and writing should not be taught as separate entities, since their development is interconnected. Rhodes & Dudley-Marling (1988) state that "Reading is an important factor in the development of writing, and much of what we learn about writing we learn through reading" (p. 83). More and more educators are realizing that in addition to children learning to read by reading and write by writing, they also learn to read by writing and write by reading (Deford, 1981; K. Goodman & Y. Goodman, 1983; Maya, 1979; cited in Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1988). Therefore, educators need to continuously integrate these two language processes in their teaching practices.

Despite the fact that they have been extremely underestimated, special needs children do have language even if they choose not to use it often (Swoger, 1989). They know a great deal more about written language than we often give them credit for knowing.

Scott is a prime example of a special needs student who knows a great deal about written language. After being in a supportive writing workshop for eight months where high school students were allowed to write what they wanted at their own pace and where all their efforts were praised and accepted, Scott made four years growth in reading. In addition to this, his writing improved dramatically and reflected significant intellectual growth (Swoger, 1989).

Feldman (1983) states that "Writing for the learning disabled students needs to be presented as a natural language activity and should be accepted initially at its present stage of development" (p. 42). Teachers need to focus on the content of students' writing first rather than being concerned about grammatical errors or spelling errors. Researchers have discovered that when teachers in regular classrooms focused their attention primarily on the content of their students' compositions, these students were able to increase their knowledge of subject matter through

their writing in content areas such as social studies and science (Newcomber, Nodine, & Barenbaum, 1988). In the past, exceptional children have rarely been encouraged to use writing as a means of enhancing their knowledge and understanding of content material. Now, educators and researchers think that children with special needs may also benefit if their writing is viewed as a means for them to develop thoughts and understanding rather than a weak area needing improvement (Newcomber et al., 1988).

Exceptional children need to be exposed to a wide variety of writing activities in the classroom (Feldman, 1983; Graham & Harris, 1988). They should be involved in expressive writing activities such as journal writing, personal narratives, and self-selected writing topics as well as more structured activities such as descriptive papers (Graham & Harris, 1988). The most important aspect to remember is that exceptional children's delays in language development should not delay their introduction to and use of meaningful writing. On the contrary, Golman & Rueda (1988) state that, "Errors children make can provide an important window on their current models of the writing system" (p. 544).

Learning and evaluating how to write involves a

complex process. One of the most successful strategies in current literature that is used to teach special needs children how to write is that known as the writing-process approach (Graves, 1983; Graves, 1985; Bos, 1988; Harste & Short, 1988, Rhodes & Marling, 1988). Graves (1985) states "Although writing-process work helps all writers, it seems to be particularly successful with people who see themselves as disenfranchised from literacy" (p. 37). Graves (1985) places children with learning disabilities and the "I-don't-know-anything" syndrome into this group.

The writing-process approach focuses on meaning and communication. In this strategy, it is imperative that the students choose their own topics. The emphasis is focused on the student teaching her teacher and fellow classmates what she knows. If students are to become independent learners, then teachers have to help them realize what they do know (Graves, 1985).

The writing-process approach involves four stages: prewriting or planning, writing, conferencing, revision, and publication. During the conferencing, the student's teacher and a few peers offer support and suggestions for revisions. Next, the student makes one of several choices. She can revise her piece based on the suggestions of others. She can publish the piece as she



originally wrote it, or she can choose not to publish it at all. The final decision is always up to the author (Graves, 1985; Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988; Bos, 1988).

For most teachers, the successfulness of implementing the writing-process approach with students with learning problems becomes evident through the personal growth they have seen in their students. Graves (1985) states that "Students who lacked confidence and initiative and were disenfranchised from literacy learn to write, share their writing with others, and take charge of their own learning" (p. 44). In addition, Susan Stires (1989) notes the difference using this strategy made in teaching writing to her intermediate-level learning disabled students. In the beginning of the year, her students saw themselves as failures as writers. However, she states, "But as they focused on expressing meaning and communicating with others in their writing throughout the year, they began to experience success, and both their concept of themselves as writers and their confidence in their abilities changed as their understanding, knowledge, and skill increased" (Stires cited in Jensen, 1989, p.71).

Furthermore, Dobson's (1985) research reveals the same positive effects of a writing program that was designed to help children experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties in first grade. When these children were provided with an environment in which the teacher acted as a partner of the writers, accepting all their inventions, responding to meaning rather than form, and encouraging risk-taking, they showed increasing gains in writing competence and confidence. These children also made strides in their reading development and were soon back into the regular classroom reading program (Dobson, 1985).

Wicklund (1989) documents how shared poetry can be used to increase learning disabled students' sight and meaning vocabularies, improve their fluency, and help them experience success in writing. Due to the natural rhythmic sounds and patterns in poetry, it is easier for students to remember the language, and they soon begin to incorporate it into their speaking and writing. After reading a poem several times and discussing it, the children brainstorm together to create a new stanza for each child using the pattern of the original poem. Such experiences provide language deficient students with an immediate feeling of success, and these poems often become their favorite selections for reading and

rereading (Wicklund, 1989).

Using patterned stories and poetry as a springboard for these students helps to bridge the gap between them and more proficient readers. Even the most reluctant writers begin to engage in writing when they are able to "borrow" another author's pattern (Ford & Ohlhausen, 1988).

Further research suggests that exposing learning disabled students to several prewriting strategies such as observing, sensory exploration, mapping, markings, and interviewing will also enhance the development of their writing skills. The five prewriting strategies help the students by providing a background of experience, assisting them in generating ideas, and by aiding them in structuring their content (Tompkins & Friend, 1986). Since these types of activities are usually incorporated into a whole language curriculum, the positive effects of such instruction are reinforced once again.

As the above research indicates, reading and writing development is an interconnected process for all children. Therefore, it is essential that writing activities be a integral part of any reading program. All children can write and exposure to written activities should not be delayed due to a child's delay

in language development.

### Programs and Strategies in the Literature

There is a continuous growth of literature emerging which supports the successfulness of using whole language with learning disabled children. With the success of several programs, the argument that special needs children can not learn to read through a whole language program is becoming increasingly weak. As mentioned previously, these children often have difficulty making meaningful connections. If their reading program consists of learning splintered skills out of context, it is going to be more difficult for these students to truly learn how to read. As special educators, we need to help these children see the connections and the "whole" picture by teaching them through holistic, meaningful programs. Hollingsworth & Reutzel (1988) state that, "Under a holistic model, the emphasis on a deficit driven approach to the learning disabled is shifted toward a strengths, ability, and child-needs-oriented perspective" (p. 479).

Ford & Ohlhausen (1988) offer regular classroom teachers several suggestions for helping disabled readers in their classrooms.

1. Teach using a thematic approach. "Themes provide opportunity to focus on real,

meaningful learning, without regard to reading ability and age differences" (Ford & Ohlhausen, 1988, p. 19).

2. Use whole language activities which capitalize on these students' strong oral language skills. This will minimize the differences between these students and more proficient readers.
3. Include activities which have built-in individualization such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and journal writing.
4. Use open ended projects such as class newspaper or a production of a play. In so doing, each child has the opportunity to use her special talent.
5. Implement a cross-grade arrangement with a group of younger students. Similar to the RATE program described earlier, an exchange program between a younger and older class provides the older less able readers with a purpose for reading books that they are comfortable reading.

Ramsey (1985) describes the positive effects of infusing whole language with the clinical reading instruction at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Traditional practices are still used at this clinic, but the following elements of whole language permeate every lesson.

1. Teachers are strongly encouraged to present significant whole language passages by reading to the children.
2. The employment of much oral language is encouraged as a part of every approach used, whether it be directed reading activity from published material, teacher-adapted published material, teacher-written material, child-composed material--or combinations thereof.
3. Every lesson must include a substantial amount of contextual reading ("real reading") in material on the student's approximate instructional or independent level. Both silent and oral reading must be used.
4. Any skill taught must be successfully applied in contextual reading situations as the final step in the skill teaching process and thereafter (p. 3-4).

Because doing a controlled study would be against the philosophy of the clinic, the achievement growth seen in the students can not be directly attributed to

the use of the whole language approach. However, Ramsey (1985) states: "The evidence occurs in the looks on children's faces when they succeed, the excitement they exhibit in Clinic activities, and their spontaneous utterances of joy -- all after long records of failure at reading and at life. The changes are registered in the strength of their desire (and ability) to read on their own from real books" (p. 9).

At the middle school level, Oberlin (1989) implemented a whole language program into her classroom of 14 learning disabled students called the Reading Workshop, which was originally introduced by Atwell (1987). The program consisted of reading mini-lessons, student sustained silent reading, and written responses to literature in dialogue journals. Before the program began, the students were given two reading attitude surveys, the Heathington Intermediate Scale and the Atwell Reading Survey. After 18 weeks, both surveys were readministered to see if there were any significant changes in reading attitudes and levels of book involvement. Both surveys did indeed reveal significant improvements in both reading attitudes and levels of book involvement. In addition, the students began to use the library more often (Oberlin & Shugarman, 1989).

The above programs are representative of whole

language programs that have been and continue to be successful when implemented with special education students. It is no longer viable for teachers to say that children with special needs can not learn to read in a whole language program. Both teachers and students must be willing to take risks in order to be able to experience the powerful learning that occurs in a whole language classroom.

Whole language is a philosophy of teaching in which learning is a two-way process between students and teachers. It is built on the premise that each and every student has something worthwhile to contribute to her education. Teachers are continuously learning from their students as well as students learning from their teachers. Children know that what they have to offer is valued, and therefore, they feel valued and successful. This occurrence is extremely positive and powerful for children who have special needs. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, they feel good about themselves, because they realize they are successful learners.

If we as educators are going to be successful at remediating our reading programs, we must address the following major issues that were discussed in this review: holistic teaching versus teaching fragmented skills, the importance of reading style and self-esteem,



reading fluency, and the connection between reading and writing. In so doing, it is essential to realize how all these facets work together in the process of teaching students how to read.

## Goals

In order to successfully teach using the whole language curriculum model, a teacher has to have a clear understanding of the philosophy of whole language. Therefore, one of the goals of this project is to introduce special education teachers to whole language by providing them with information that explains the foundation of this philosophy of teaching, thus enhancing their understanding of whole language.

The strategies and activities in this handbook integrate the four language systems of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and demonstrate how these language systems work together to enhance one's understanding and use of language. These strategies focus on using literature and holistic approaches to develop reading fluency, enhance comprehension, and to connect reading and writing. In turn, students with learning difficulties in whole language classrooms will begin to feel better about themselves as they begin to realize that they are already successful language users.

Furthermore, this project is intended to provide teachers with methods that help special needs children understand that learning to read should be enjoyable and meaningful in addition to being functional. The strategies and activities are designed to assist

children in realizing that these teachers value what their students think and that each and every student has something worthwhile to contribute. The project encourages teachers to build on the strengths of each student rather than trying to remediate her deficit or weak areas.

This project is also designed to help teachers understand that learning is a social event and that teachers learn from students as well as students learn from teachers. Learning is a continuous interactive process.

The strategies and activities in this handbook are centered around literature appropriate for special needs students in second and third grades, but these strategies and activities can be adapted for both younger and older children by using literature appropriate for those levels.

Finally, I hope this introductory handbook entices special education teachers to further pursue learning about and implementing whole language teaching with their students. Integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities with meaningful language provides the connection special needs students need in order for them to be successful.

### Limitations

This project is primarily designed for learning disabled students in second and third grade. However, it can be adapted to meet the needs of younger and older students as well as other special needs populations. This will require choosing literature appropriate for those age groups. There are a few strategies that would not be appropriate for high school level students, but most of the strategies can be adapted for this level also. Teacher judgement will be the determining factor in choosing the strategies to implement.

This project is not intended to cover the entire scope of whole language strategies. The purpose of this handbook is to provide strategies for special education teachers that they can implement immediately while they acquire further knowledge about whole language. The handbook is designed to make it easy for beginning whole language teachers to implement the strategies described.

In addition, this handbook is not intended to provide a complete curriculum program. Instead, it is designed to provide whole language strategies that a teacher can incorporate into her thematic teaching and overall curriculum.

This project is not intended to address the specific needs of ESL-English as a Second Language

students. The strategies in this handbook can certainly be adapted to meet these students needs appropriately, but it will require the expertise of a bilingual teacher to accomplish this goal.

Lastly, the whole language strategies in this handbook can certainly be implemented by a teacher in a regular classroom. However, she would have to choose literature appropriate for her grade level. Some of the literature mentioned in these strategies may not be challenging enough for students in a regular classroom. Some of the books listed in the handbook may be below some second and third graders interest level in order to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties. In addition, certain guidelines in the strategies are adapted to meet these special students' needs. Therefore, a regular classroom teacher will have to use her judgement when deciding which guidelines to use and/or omit.

## Evaluation

"The power of evaluation in whole language classrooms lies in the process of becoming--the changes or moves that people make from what they are to what they come to be. These moves are important not just for students but equally for the professional development of teachers and the dynamic nature of the ongoing curriculum" (Goodman, 1989, p.3). This quote by Yetta Goodman clearly states the focus and purpose of evaluation in whole language teaching.

In a whole language classroom, a student's progress and growth is not measured by standardized achievement tests or skills inventory checklists. Evaluation is an ongoing occurrence which focuses on the student's learning as a process. Both the teacher and students observe not only what but how the students are learning. In such an environment, standards become intrinsic. "When learners are engaged in purposeful experiences, success lies in fulfilling the intended purpose and progress is judged on the basis of students' ability to handle increasingly complex language and thinking tasks" (Newman & Church, 1990, p.22).

Evaluating the students' success and growth with the strategies in this handbook will be an ongoing process using various methods of authentic assessment.

## Observation

One of the most informative means of assessment and one that can be used with every strategy is this handbook is that of observation or kidwatching. Kidwatching does not consume a great deal of the teacher's time. Rather, the teacher's observations should be very brief and unstructured. Soon after the teacher begins to focus on observing her students, it will become something she does naturally and automatically.

Teachers can learn a great deal about their students by observing them while they are involved in any activity. When the students are working in groups, the teacher can observe how they interact with each other and how they problem solve. When a student is working alone, the teacher can observe her strengths as well as the areas in which she is having difficulty. By watching a child during the actual thought process, the teacher is often able to assess how she can assist the student more effectively than if she simply evaluates the end product.

## Anecdotal Records

To help teachers remember their observations,

anecdotal records should be a part of every student's assessment plan. This does not mean that the teacher writes down each and every observation, but rather notes significant information that is indicative of a student's progress at any given point in time. Anecdotal records are extremely helpful to both teachers and parents. Among other things, teachers can use anecdotal records as a means of reflection for both assessing a student's progress as well as for making future instructional decisions. For parents, anecdotal records provide a concrete means for them to see how their child is growing and progressing on a regular basis.

### Interaction

Teacher and student interaction is another method of assessment that should be implemented with the strategies in this handbook. Once again, teachers can learn a great deal about their students by interacting with them during activities. For example, by interacting with a student during a strategy such as Say Something, the teacher can clearly observe how the student is interpreting what she is reading. If the student is unable to respond to the reading, it may indicate that she is having difficulty with the text.



In such a situation, the teacher can intervene and discuss certain strategies that the student can use when they encounter specific problems with a text.

Interacting with students during writing strategies such as Picture Setting or Generated Written Discourse, enables a teacher to gain a great deal of insight about what the student knows about language and the writing process. As a result of such interaction, the teacher can share her observations with the student, so the student becomes aware of her own learning which is very important. In addition, the teacher can, once again, make instructional decisions concerning how she will help the student.

### Portfolios

Student portfolios are also excellent sources for evaluating students' progress. Portfolios should contain student writing samples which are accumulated throughout the year. A teacher can easily see how a student has progressed over a period of time by looking at this folder. Portfolios not only provide an overall picture, but by examining the samples of students' writing, the teacher can assess the specific areas of growth in each student.

## Journals

Similarly, Journals also provide information about students' growth in writing. Even though Journal writing is usually a less formal genre of writing, a teacher can still observe students' progress of over time. For some students, this may mean a difference in the length of their entries. For others, it may mean growth in the length and content of their writing. Certain Journals such as Dialogue Journals encourage interaction between the students and the teacher. As with other teacher-student interactions, these opportunities may result in both the teacher and student gaining insights about each other. This exchange of knowledge and insights is invaluable. The philosophy of whole language is based on the premise that learning is an interactive process. Therefore, in a whole language environment, both the students and teacher learn from each other and learn together.

## Writing Conferences

Holding Writing Conferences is yet another means of evaluating students' growth in both reading and writing. Writing Conferences can be structured in various ways, but all conferences provide an opportunity for students and teachers to review specific writing samples. In

doing this, the student has time to reflect on her writing and her understanding of the writing process. Together, the teacher and student evaluate both the strengths and weaknesses of the writing sample and formulate goals for the student's future writing pieces. This type of self-assessment is very valuable for a student, because it helps her realize that she is in control of her learning and, in turn, is responsible for setting her own goals and objectives.

In order for assessment to be effective, it needs to be authentic. Evaluation is communication. It is the means by which students and teachers examine what knowledge has been attained and which instruction may or may not be effective. Therefore, whole language teaching does not only involve implementing holistic and meaningful teaching practices, but it also involves developing and implementing holistic and meaningful methods of evaluating those practices. The tools discussed above are examples of methods that are appropriate to use with the strategies in this handbook. There are certainly other ways of holistically assessing students that a teacher can and should consider implementing.

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## **Appendix**

### **ENABLING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS TO FEEL WHOLE THROUGH WHOLE LANGUAGE**

## Strategies to Develop Reading Fluency

There are certain underlying premises that a teacher needs to consider when addressing reading fluency. It is not appropriate to present a student with difficult material when trying to improve her fluency.

The reading materials used to develop reading fluency should be at the student's independent reading level. They should be passages that are relatively easy and familiar to the student as well as passages she has previously read. Teachers should often present stories and books that contain patterns and/or rhyming language. In addition, predictable books are also excellent sources of materials for developing reading fluency due to the very fact that their language is predictable.

It is sometimes difficult to improve reading fluency, but implementing the above guidelines will help increase the student's chances of being successful.

### REPEATED READINGS

Developed by: S. J. Samuels

Concept: This strategy helps to expand the total number of words a student can recognize instantaneously. In turn, the student's attention is freed to concentrate on comprehension.

There are several things that can be done to keep the student motivated to practice her passages. These suggestions are included in the procedures.

#### Materials

- \* several different passages and/or stories
- \* tape recorder
- \* paper for charting

#### Procedures

1. The student rereads a passage until a criterion level of mastery is achieved.
2. Use several passages at a time to help alleviate boredom.
3. When first implementing this strategy, the teacher should choose passages that are short and simple to increase the probability of immediate student success. As the student improves her speed and accuracy, the passages introduced should gradually increase in difficulty.
4. To help motivate the student further, the teacher can present several selections that would be appropriate for student's level

and let the student choose which ones she would like to practice.

5. Let the student chart her own progress.
6. When the student masters the texts, let her perform them for others.
7. The teacher can also have the student record her repeated readings on a tape recorder. In addition to this being a motivating factor, it also provides immediate feedback for the student.

## IMITATIVE READING

Developed by: E. B. Huey

Concept: This strategy is especially helpful for students with serious reading problems, because the technique of imitating lets them see and hear the passages first which provides them with the strong support they need.

### Materials

- \* two copies of a reading selection

### Procedures

1. Imitative Reading consists of the teacher

- reading a segment of the text aloud while the student is following along silently.
2. When the teacher completes the passage, the student attempts to echo what the teacher said.
  3. In the beginning, the teacher should choose small segments of easy reading material so that the child is able to echo whole sentences. The teacher should not go on until the student is able to repeat a whole sentence.
  4. To help increase student motivation, let the student choose from a variety of texts appropriate for her level and ability.
  5. As time progresses, the teacher should introduce more difficult material gradually as the modeled reading segments increase in length.

## PAIRED READING

Developed by: F. P. Greene

Concept: One way to improve students' reading fluency is to group them according to their general reading ability so that a sense of teamwork develops, and the students are supported if they make a mistake.

## Materials

- \* two copies of the same story or text
- \* optional--tape recorder, blank tape

## Procedures

1. Paired Reading consists of two students reading the same text in unison.
2. Each student needs to be paired with someone who has the same general reading ability.
3. When a student does make an error, the other student should assist them immediately.
4. When Paired Reading is first implemented, the materials used should be equally familiar to both students.
5. These sessions can be tape-recorded, so they can be played back for the students to evaluate. When the students evaluate their reading, they should not only discuss word recognition accuracy, but also such things as their reading rate, pausing, intonation, and their expressive oral interpretation.

## TAPED READINGS

Developed by: C. Chomsky

Concept: This strategy is used when students' word recognition abilities are severely restricted.

Students' fluency improves as a result of hearing and seeing the words simultaneously. It supports the readers, because they do not have to struggle to figure out unknown words. Taped readings enable a student to gain confidence in a nonthreatening environment, because the student is working independently with the auditory support of the text. Therefore, it alleviates the student's feelings that they have to "perform" in front of others.

### Materials

- \* one copy of the selected literature
- \* taped version of the literature
- \* tape recorder

### Procedures

1. The teacher gives the student both a written and taped version of a particular text.
2. The student is told to read the text while listening to the tape until she can read the text on their own.



3. After the student practices the text a few times, the teacher can ask the student to draw her favorite part of the story. This type of activity provides a break for the student.
4. To enhance student motivation, the teacher should look for stories that are geared towards the student's interests.

## RADIO READING

Developed by: L. W. Searfoss

Concept: This strategy supports the student and makes her feel more comfortable reading aloud, because it enables her to paraphrase the text if necessary without anyone knowing besides the teacher.

### Materials

- \* selections from newspapers, magazines, or any source whose contents can be converted into a news story
- \* two copies of each selection (one for the student and one for the teacher)

### Procedures

1. Each student is given a "script" which she

practices silently or aloud to the teacher until she feels confident with reading it. At this time, emphasis is placed first on the meaning of the story so that the student can paraphrase the parts that are difficult for her.

2. When each student is ready, she reads her "script" to the rest of the group pretending she is the broadcaster.
3. The reader and the teacher are the only two people who have copies of the script. Therefore, if the student makes minor word recognition errors, but the story still makes sense, no one will know the difference.

#### PHRASE-CUED TEXTS OR CHUNKING

Developed by: B. Amble

Concept: Often times, poor readers have an underdeveloped ability to phrase or chunk written texts into meaningful units. This strategy provides cues to help the reader process the texts more meaningfully and efficiently.

## Materials

- \* literature passages
- \* pencil

## Procedures

1. The teacher divides the passages into phrase groups using a pencil to make slash marks right in the text.
2. The student practices these phrases.
3. As the student masters the smaller phrases, the teacher gradually removes the slashes one by one until the student is reading whole sentences.
4. The cues help the reader process the texts more meaningfully and efficiently. As a result, both the student's fluency and comprehension improve.

## CHORAL READING

Cited in: "Holistic Approaches to the Remediation of Difficulties in Reading Fluency" by Timothy V. Rasinski.

Concept: Choral Reading provides a nonthreatening environment for developing reading fluency. The group reading supports all students, and no student is singled

out.

### Materials

- \* Any genre of literature can be used with choral reading, but plays and poetry in particular adapt well to this strategy.
- \* multiple copies of the literature selection
- \* optional--tape recorder, tape with a recorded story

This strategy involves the group reading of a text. However, there are many variations to this technique.

### Procedures

1. The entire group can read the text in unison.
2. The whole group can be divided into smaller groups with each group reading a particular section or verse.
3. There could be some parts that are read as solos or in pairs.
4. Students can read along with a tape recording of a story at the listening center.
5. One of the enjoyable aspects of this strategy is that you can vary it within one oral reading session. As a group, the students and the

teacher can decide on parts for one reading,  
and then they can choose different parts and  
read the selection again.

The following is a list of a several poems and/or  
books that work well with second and third grade  
students with learning difficulties:

Adams, Pam. There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly.

Kent, Jack. Twelve Days of Christmas.

Martin, Bill Jr. Brown Bear, Brown Bear.

Scheer, Jullian & Marvin Bileck. Rain Makes  
Applesauce.

Sendak, Maurice. Where the Wild Things Are.

Silverstein, Shel. "Signals" from A Light in the  
Attic.

Silverstein, Shel. "I Must Remember" from Where the  
Sidewalk Ends.

Silverstein, Shel. "The Dirtiest Man in th World" from  
Where the Sidewalk Ends.

Silverstein, Shel. "Magical Eraser" from Where the  
Sidewalk Ends.

Silverstein, Shel. "Clooney the Clown" from A Light in  
the Attic.

## NEUROLOGICAL IMPRESS METHOD--NIM

Developed by: R. G. Heckelman

Concept: This strategy is based on the concept that if the words are seen, heard, and said at the same time, the multisensory involvement will "impress" the fluid reading patterns of the teacher onto the student.

### Materials

- \* a single copy of a story or text

### Procedures

1. This strategy consist of the teacher and the student reading the same passage aloud together.
2. In the beginning, while the student is getting used to this method, the teacher should choose passages that are short and familiar to the student. Once the student is comfortable with this technique, more challenging material can be used.
3. Both the teacher and the student hold the same text, and the teacher points to each word as they read it in unison.
4. In the beginning, the student is instructed to

follow along in a somewhat softer voice.

5. As the student progresses and begins to gain confidence and control, the teacher begins to read softer and may lag slightly behind the student's reading.
6. To prevent boredom, several different passages or pages of a text should be covered during a session rather than repeating one passage several times.
7. In order to obtain noticeable results, it is suggested that teachers implement the NIM strategy three times a week for a minimum of ten consecutive weeks.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. This strategy does require a great deal of the teacher's time working one on one with a student. To help alleviate this situation, the following variation can be implemented. A teacher can arrange the students in reading dyads in which one strong student is designated as the lead reader, and the second reader is the assisted reader. The lead reader, in turn, takes the role of the teacher.

## READER'S THEATER

### Concept:

"Reader's theater is a minimally staged interpretation of a script developed from many kinds of literature, such as poems, plays, stories, etc. The script can be adapted or cut from a single work, or it can be compiled from various sources and organized to illustrate a point, tell a story or explore a mood" (Malkin, 1976, p.71).

An advantage of using Reader's Theater to the develop special needs students' reading fluency is that it is structured so that a teacher can easily couple stronger readers with weaker readers which definitely benefits the weaker readers without causing them to feel intimidated. Also, Reader's Theater provides a nonthreatening environment for developing fluency. As long as the meaning is not altered, students can deviate slightly from the text without being singled out.

### Materials

- \* multiple copies of literature or scripts
- \* simple props such as chairs, stools, hats, etc.

Certain styles of Reader's Theater use more elaborate props and costumes, but it is not



necessary to do so.

#### Procedures and Guidelines

1. The piece of literature chosen should contain a great deal of dialogue, interesting characters, and rhythmic language.
2. The literature used can already be scripted such as a play, or the teacher and students can adapt the selection into a script together.
3. When first introducing Reader's Theater to students, present short pieces of literature such as poems at perhaps a level slightly below their instructional level, so they can experience success immediately. This will enable them to concentrate on the other aspects as well as get a feel for Reader's Theater. Once the students become more comfortable with Reader's Theater, introduce more challenging material.
4. Read a couple of selections to the students and then let them choose which piece to do. This indicates to the students that the teacher values their decisions.
5. Read through the selection as a whole 2-3 times, so the students become familiar with the

vocabulary before adapting the literature into a script.

6. Script the literature together as a class and assign or have students choose parts. Each student gets a copy of the script.
7. Each student's part needs to be highlighted.  
In the beginning, choose two or more people for each part, so again, the students feel successful and supported rather than intimidated. Move to solo parts later.
8. Provide plenty of time for the students to practice their parts. The students do not memorize their lines as is done in traditional theater. The emphasis in Reader's Theater is reading and oral interpretation.
9. Discuss and decide who will be sitting and/or standing and where the students will be positioned for the performance.
10. Reader's Theater can be performed for various audiences such as other classmates, another classroom, the principal and/or parents, etc.

#### Extension Activities

1. Reader's Theater could also be used as a writing strategy. If the students adapt or

script the story to be performed, they are developing their writing skills.

Reader's Theater can be performed in four different styles. For the purpose of handbook, I have included a sample of how to script a selection of literature in Simple Style appropriate for second and/or third grade. For further information about the other three styles and Reader's Theater in general, please see the appendix bibliography.

## "WITH HIS MOUTH FULL OF FOOD"

by Shel Silverstein

Adapted by Trisha Moran

for

SIMPLE THEATER

### CAST

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Mother

Dad

Milford Dupree

## SET-UP

X--(Mother seated)

X--(Father seated)

X--(Milford seated)

X

(Narrator 1  
standing)

X

(Narrator 2  
standing)

## FOCUS & STYLE

The Narrators use audience focus. Mother, Dad, and Milford use off-stage focus.

There is no pantomime, but the readings should be as expressive as possible.

## ENTRANCE

All interpreters enter with their scripts.

Narrator 1, Mother, and Milford enter from Stage Right as Narrator 2 and Father enter from Stage Left.

When all five are in place, Mother, Milford, and Father sit facing the audience while the two Narrators remain standing facing the audience.

## SCRIPT

NARRATOR 1: MILFORD DUPREE, THOUGH HE KNEW IT WAS

RUDE, TALKED WITH HIS MOUTH FULL OF FOOD.

(Milford looks with Off-Stage Focus)

NARRATOR 2: HE NEVER WOULD BURP OR WALK OUT IN THE NUDE, BUT HE TALKED WITH HIS MOUTH FULL OF FOOD.

NARRATOR 1: HIS MOTHER SAID,

(Mother looks up from her script)

MOTHER: MILFORD, IT'S CRUDE AND IT'S LEWD TO TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL OF FOOD. WHY, EVEN THE MILK COW WHO MOO'D AS SHE CHEWED NEVER MOO'D WITH HER MOUTH FULL OF FOOD. AND THE CUCKOO WOULD NEVER HAVE EVER CUCKOO'D IF HE COO'D WITH HIS MOUTH FULL OF FOOD.

NARRATOR 2: HIS DAD SAID,

(Dad looks up from his script)

DAD: GET MARRIED OR GO GET TATTOOED, BUT DON'T TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL OF FOOD. IF IT WAS A CRIME, YOU WOULD SURELY GET SUED IF YOU TALKED WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL OF FOOD. WHY, JUST LIKE AN ANIMAL YOU SHOULD BE ZOO'D AS YOU TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL OF FOOD. FOR YOU KNOW WE'RE ALL PUT IN A TERRIBLE MOOD WHEN YOU TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL OF FOOD.

NARRATOR 1: THEY PLEADED AND BEGGED. HE JUST GIGGLED

AND CHEWED AND LAUGHED WITH HIS MOUTH FULL  
OF FOOD.

(Milford smiles and chews slightly)

NARRATOR 2: AND ALL THEY ADVISED HIM HE SIMPLY  
POO-POO'D, HE POO-POO'D WITH HIS MOUTH  
FULL OF FOOD.

NARRATOR 1: SO THEY SENT FOR THE GLUER AND HAD HIS  
MOUTH GLUED

NARRATOR 2: 'CAUSE HE TALKED WITH HIS MOUTH FULL OF  
FOOD.

NARRATOR 1: HE SAYS,

MILFORD: (Looking distressed) GNU, MURNOOD, I WUN  
TUK WIN MNY MARF FURU FOOG.

(All interpreters close scripts, put their heads down.  
Then they stand, bow, and exit as they came in).

The following is a list of a several books which  
can be easily adapted for Reader's Theater at the second  
and/or third grade.

Carle, Eric. The Very Hungry Caterpillar.

Galdone, Paul. The Little Red Hen.

Galdone, Paul. The Three Little Pigs.

Hoff, Syd. Danny and the Dinosaur.  
Lobel, Arnold. Frog and Toad are Friends.  
Martin, Bill Jr. Brown Bear, Brown Bear.  
Numeroff, Laura. If You Give a Mouse a Cookie.  
Slobodkina, Esphyr. Caps for Sale.  
Waber, Bernard. Ira Sleeps Over.  
White, E. B. Charlotte's Web.

#### PATTERN AND PREDICTABLE BOOKS

Concept: Both pattern and predictable books are excellent sources of literature for developing reading fluency. The rhythms used in pattern books help to develop fluency through their consistent language. The student begins to increase her word recognition through repetition.

Similarly, predictable books help increase reading fluency, because the predictable language enables the child to anticipate what word is coming next. Both pattern and predictable books increase students' self-confidence, because they feel successful at being able to read whole books.

The following is a list of pattern and predictable books that are appropriate for special needs children in

second and/or third grade.

Aardema, Verna. Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain.

Aardema, Verna. Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears.

Adams, Pam. There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly.

Allen, Pamela. Who Sank the Boat?

Blair, Susan. The Three Billy-Goats Gruff.

Brown, Margaret Wise. Goodnight Moon.

Carle, Eric. The Grouchy Ladybug.

de Paola, Tomie. Now One Foot, Now the Other.

Ets, Marie Hall. Play with Me.

Greenberg, David. Slugs.

Kipling, Rudyard. The Elephant's Child.

Most, Bernard. If the Dinosaurs Came Back.

Noble, Trinka H. The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash.

Plume, Ilse. The Bremen Town Musicians.

Sendak, Maurice. Chicken Soup With Rice.

Tolstoy, Alexei. The Great Big Enormous Turnip.

Viorst, Judith. Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible,

No Good, Very Bad Day.

Viorst, Judith. Alexander Who Used to be Rich Last  
Sunday.

Viorst, Judith. The Tenth Good Thing About Barney.

Wood, Audrey. The Napping House.



## Comprehension Strategies

### SKETCH TO STRETCH

Developed by: Jerome Harste, Carolyn Burke, Marjorie Siegel, and Karen Feathers

Concept: Sketch to Stretch provides an alternate means for students to demonstrate their understanding of what they have read. It is especially helpful for students who struggle with written language, because they realize there are other ways of communicating what they understand. Also, it shows students that different individuals have different interpretations based on their prior knowledge and experience.

#### Materials:

- \* literature selection--ex. The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein
- \* paper, pencil, crayons, colored markers

#### Procedures

1. The teacher explains that she is going to read a story, and afterwards, the students are going to draw a picture which illustrates what the story meant to them.
2. The teacher explains there are many ways of representing a story and many different

interpretations.

3. Next, the teacher reads the story to the children.
4. The students are given plenty of time to draw their pictures after the story is read.
5. When the sketches are completed, the students are divided up into groups of four or five. Then, each child explains her picture to the group and what significance it has to the story.
6. After students finish sharing their pictures, the group discusses the similarities and differences in pictures and interpretations.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. Teacher/students display their interpretations on a bulletin board along with the selection on which they were based.
2. Make a class book containing the various interpretations.
3. Have a "MUSEUM WALK"--After the pictures are displayed, the students walk by the display to have an opportunity to look at the other students' pictures.
4. Encourage the students to draw sketches when

they are writing as a means of expanding their interpretations and intentions for their audiences.

5. This activity is appropriate for all grade levels by simply choosing a different story selection.
6. Older students can divide up into small groups in the beginning, and they can either choose one person to read the story aloud, do shared reading, or read the story silently.

#### MUSIC/RHYTHM STRATEGY

Developed by: Joe Gray

Concept: Music is a powerful communication system that can be used to enrich the meaning and interpretation of a story. Students can express their understanding of literature through rhythms and music.

Note: Prior to implementing this strategy, a teacher would have to spend a considerable amount of time discussing and teaching her students about rhythms. She would need to expose the students to various types of rhythms through music. She should discuss basic concepts such as: slow vs. fast rhythms, upbeat vs.

downbeat rhythms, and steady vs. fluctuating rhythms.

Following this, the teacher should teach the students certain rhythms of her choice. She can do this using instruments and/or her hands and feet. They should practice these until the students feel comfortable with the rhythms. After this, the children should have an opportunity to create their own rhythms.

The teacher will have to use her own judgement to decide when the students are ready to try the following strategy.

#### Materials

- \* a story or a book containing well-defined characters--ex. Cinderella by Brothers Grimm
- \* hands and feet, instruments--optional

#### Procedures

1. The teacher establishes a mind set for this strategy by informing the students of the number of characters that are in the story, ie. three. Then she explains to them that after she reads the story to them, they are going to match a specific rhythm with each of the character's personality.
2. Next, the teacher practices the specific

- rhythms with the students.
3. The teacher begins reading the story aloud.
  4. After the teacher has read enough to reveal some of the characters, she would stop for a "commercial" break. At this point, the teacher and students would discuss the characteristics of the people revealed thus far. Students with learning difficulties at the second and third grade levels will need some assistance with this at first, unless they are already used to discussing characteristics. The teacher may ask the students to describe the characters and to support their descriptions with specifics and/or inferences from the story.
  5. Next, the teacher continues reading. Several pages later, the teacher may choose to stop again for another "commercial" break if more information about the characters is revealed. The teacher would repeat procedure number four.
  6. At the end of the story, the teacher would review the rhythms, and then give the students time to decide which rhythm goes with each character. After they decided, the students would share their choices and reasons for their choices. There are no right or wrong answers

to this activity. As long as they back up their choices with reasons, all answers are valid.

7. The rhythms in this strategy can be expressed using instruments or hands and feet.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. Instead of the teacher creating the rhythms, the students can create the rhythms that represent the characters' personalities.
2. The students can be divided up into groups, and each group can create a rhythm pattern with instruments for one character. Each group would take a different character.
3. The students could create a rhythm that represents the mood of the whole story instead of the characters' personalities.

#### SAY SOMETHING

Developed by: Jerome Harste, Carolyn Burke, and  
Dorothy Watson

Concept: "Language and language learning are inherently social events. Say Something highlights the social nature of language and demonstrates that understanding

develops and evolves from our interaction with others" (Harste, Watson, & Burke, 1988, p.336).

This strategy would work particularly well with reading that is part of a thematic unit and/or a content area literature. For example, if the class was studying Africa, this Say Something strategy could be used to enhance the students understanding of the African culture through such books as *Africa Dream* by E. Greenfield or *Cornrows* by C. Yarbrough.

#### Materials

- \* multiple copies of a reading selection
- \* poster board or butcher block paper, markers

#### Procedures

1. Teachers need to model this strategy first to make sure the students understand what they are suppose to do.
2. The teacher chooses a partner to demonstrate the strategy. She explains that each student will be choosing a partner.
3. The teacher explains that the students will be reading the selection with their partners and that they have to decide whether they will read

the selection aloud or silently. In the beginning, the students may feel more comfortable and supported if they read aloud. However, this may not necessarily be true. The teacher needs to use her judgement based on her knowledge of the students remembering that the students get to make the final decision.

4. The students are told that they will be discussing what they read with their partners as they go along. Each group gets to decide where they want to stop, but this should be discussed and decided upon before they start reading. After the students read a few paragraphs, they stop and "say something" to their respective partners about what they read. When both people have responded, they continue reading until they reach the next stopping point. Once again, both students respond to the reading and then continue on in this manner until they finish the story or text.
5. With special needs children, it is important initially to give them some guidelines for their responses. A great deal of these students are not use to being asked to respond to their reading in this manner.



Explain to them that they can simply restate what they read, make predictions about what they think will happen next, or relate the text to another reading or to a personal experience. Also, it is important to explain that there are no right or wrong answers and that everyone's interpretation is accepted as long as the student can support it.

6. After all the students have finished the reading, the class can have a group discussion about the topics the author discussed and their interpretations. As the students brainstorm their ideas, the teacher writes them on butcher block paper or poster board. The teacher should group the ideas according to how they relate to to each other. Then, the students can see and discuss the similarities and differences in their interpretations. This will enhance the students' understanding of the text and of the idea that individuals have different interpretations of the same text.

Students with learning difficulties will need a great deal of practice with this strategy so that they begin to feel comfortable taking risks. It is important to give them time to get use to using "say something" as

a means to help enhance their comprehension. Also, it is very important that the teacher chooses a partner and participates in this activity, so the students see its value and how it is used by successful language users. It is a strategy that is particularly successful for students who have strong orals skills. It gives them an opportunity to use one of their strengths as a means of improving their comprehension.

After the students have had several opportunities to use Say Something, the teacher should ask them how this strategy helped them make sense out of what they read. In doing this, the teacher is making the students aware that this is a strategy that they can use in the future to help them when they encounter difficult material.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. With older students, the class could be divided up into small groups. The same procedures would be followed as is done in partner Say Something. The discussion of a segment would involve a group rather than just two people.
2. After the class has completed reading a text using the Say Something strategy, each student

could draw a picture representing her overall interpretation of the material. Then, these pictures could be shared, and each student could state whether or not her interpretation changed at all as a result of the class discussion.

3. This Say Something strategy can be extended into a writing strategy. After the students have completed Say Something, they could write a short summary of their interpretations of the text.

#### Rhetorical Imitation

Developed by: H. C. Lodge (cited in Integrating Reading & Writing Instruction in Grades K-8 by Ruth M. Noyce and James F. Christie).

Concept: This strategy focuses on both enhancing a student's reading comprehension and increasing her vocabulary. Vocabulary should not be taught in isolation. Words need to be presented in context so that the language is meaningful to the student.

## Materials

- \* a 250 word passage from literature chosen randomly (The selection should not be connected with a previous reading.)
- \* pencil
- \* optional--overhead projector, transparencies, acetate markers

## Procedures for Preparing the Passage

1. Keep the first and last line of the passage intact.
2. Beginning with the second sentence, delete every fifth word.

## Procedures for the Activity

1. As a whole class activity, put the passage on the overhead projector.
2. Have students read each sentence. When they reach a blank space, have them brainstorm all the possible words that would make sense in that space. Encourage the students to use both semantic and syntactic clues to help them think of appropriate words.
3. The teacher writes down all the suggestions on the transparency.

4. Then, have the students predict which word they think is in the actual passage by choosing one of the suggestions mentioned for each blank space. Circle the words they choose.
5. After the students have made their predictions, show them the complete passage. Check and confirm predictions to see how many of their choices match the original text.
6. At this point, the teacher should reassure the students that any words that are synonyms for the words in the original text would be acceptable, because the synonyms would not change the meaning of the passage. The teacher should also reinforce the fact that this is one strategy that good readers use when they come to an unknown word.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. This activity could also be done on paper. The students could do it as an independent activity or in small groups.
2. The teacher can supply the first letter of each missing word as a clue.
3. The teacher can supply the initial and/or final consonant of each missing word when it applies.

4. The teacher can supply choices of words underneath the blank line and the students can choose one.
5. For younger and/or lower level students, the teacher can provide picture clues for the missing words.
6. This strategy can also be used as a writing strategy. The students can write letters to each other using this Rhetorical Imitation procedure to see if the recipients can figure out the missing words.

#### STORY ENDING STRATEGY

Developed by: L. K. Rhodes and J. A. Clyde

Concept: A proficient reader naturally interacts with the text and makes predictions based on what she has read of the text at any given point. This strategy is particularly helpful for the student who needs to develop such prediction strategies. Also, Story Ending provides support for the reader/writer who lacks confidence, because it provides a structure that she can build onto and extend.

## Materials

- \* a story or book which features a clearly discernible plot and climax
- \* paper, pen or pencils

## Procedures

1. The teacher needs to read the selection ahead of time so that she can decide where she will stop reading, and the students will begin writing. The teacher should stop just before the climax or the turning point in the story.
2. The teacher then provides a mind set for the students by informing them that after they have heard the first part of the story, they will write their own ending for it.
3. It is important to let the students know that they can write whatever ending they wish as long as it makes sense in light of the events described thus far in the story and as long as anyone who chooses to read the original text with its new ending would not suspect that a change in authorship had occurred.
4. Read the story to the students stopping at the point where they are to begin writing. The teacher should have the book available for the

students to refer to while they are writing in case they wish to reread a section of the story. If the book is somewhat above their independent reading level, they may request that the teacher rereads a section to them.

5. When the students have finished writing, they should have an opportunity to share their endings with the class. Reading several paragraphs from the original story prior to each student's ending provides a sense of continuity.
6. The students should be encouraged to discuss the strengths of each ending mentioning the parts that liked most.
7. Following this step, the teacher reads the published ending to the story, and the students discuss the similarities between their endings and the original ending.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. In addition to enhancing students' comprehension, this Story Ending strategy can be used as a writing strategy.
2. Instead of the teacher reading the story to the students, the students could read it



- independently or in pairs.
3. After reading the first part of the story, the students could break up into small groups and write a group ending to the story. These could then be shared, and the class could predict which ending they think will be closest to the published version.
  4. The students could draw illustrations to go along with their story endings. The illustrations could be shuffled together, and the students could match the illustrations with their corresponding written endings.
  5. Instead of the students writing endings to the story, they could divide up into groups and act out/dramatize their versions of the ending.

#### DRAMA SEQUENCING STRATEGY

Developed by: Trisha Moran

Concept: Drama is yet another communication system that can be used to enhance one's comprehension. A student can express her understanding of a story through drama and/or role playing. For children with learning difficulties, it provides a nonthreatening environment through which they can express their knowledge.

## Materials

- \* a story or book
- \* small index cards, pen or pencil

To prepare for this strategy, the teacher needs to write down the major events in the story on index cards. Write one event on each card. The number of events will vary depending on the particular story. However, five events is usually a manageable amount when first introducing this strategy. If there are too many events, it will be too difficult for the students to remember them all.

## Procedures

1. Before actually beginning this strategy, the teacher should review the concept of sequencing with her students.
2. The teacher informs the students that they are going to retell a story by acting out the major events of the story in their proper sequence.
3. She tells the students to listen carefully while she reads the story to them.
4. After the story is read, discuss the major events with the students.

5. Following this, divide the students up into five groups or however many events are written on cards for them to act out. Explain to the students that each group will act out one event from the story. The groups will not know which events the other groups have to reenact.
6. Provide plenty of time for the students to practice reenacting their group's event.
7. When all the groups are ready, the teacher will randomly choose a group to dramatize their event. After their performance, the other students will discuss which occurrence the group reenacted. Then, the teacher chooses another group to present its event. This procedure continues until all groups have presented their reenactments.
8. Next, the teacher asks the students which event occurs first in the story, second, third, and so on. After the events are put in their proper sequence, the groups present their events again in the order they occur in the story. Thus, the class is retelling the story through their dramatizations.

### Extension Activities/Variations

1. After feeling comfortable with this strategy, the class could tell the story to another class through their dramatizations. The teacher or a classmate could be the narrator describing the reenactments as they are performed.
2. This could also be extended into a writing strategy. Older students could write their own version of the major events that occur in the story. Once younger students do this strategy a few times, they may also be able to write their own versions.

## Reading/Writing Strategies

### JOURNAL WRITING

Concept: Journal writing is a valuable tool for enhancing students' reading and writing development in a nonthreatening, supportive mode. Journals provide students with a means of communicating their thoughts, feelings, and ideas without having to be concerned with the mechanics of written language. As a result, students begin to see the value of writing, and it becomes meaningful to them (Rubenstein, 1989).

Journal writing provides a means of building students' morale, because it gives students an opportunity to be successful in an area that may have intimidated them in the past. The focus is on content and effort, so students feel less inhibited to write. Soon, students naturally become better writers through daily practice (Gregg, 1984).

Also, journals enable teachers to gain insights and knowledge about their students. With this understanding, a teacher can begin to develop a more personal relationship with a student and begin to learn how she can help that student succeed (Rubenstein, 1989).

## Materials

- \* can use various materials--looseleaf paper with construction paper cover
- \* ringed notebooks
- \* stenopads

## Types of Journals

There are several different types of Journals that a teacher may choose to implement in her classroom depending on which ones she feels would best serve the needs of her students.

Private or Personal Journal: These Journals are similar to diaries in that they are personal accounts of the students' thoughts, feelings, problems, concerns, etc. They are not shared with others unless the student decides to do so. If the student does not want the teacher to read her Journal on a certain day, the student would mark the particular entry as private (Harste & Short, 1988).

Oxendine (1988) believes that through the personal dialogue a student has with herself, self-understanding is heightened. She also thinks that the very nature of the act of writing makes education more real to the students, because they can see their ideas emerge.

Journal writing enables students to write about topics they consider relevant, thus it becomes meaningful (Oxendine, 1988).

Dialogue Journal: These journals consist of the student writing a daily entry and the teacher writing a response. Because this is such a time consuming endeavor, Gambrell (1985) suggests doing Dialogue Journals with one small group at a time for a certain period of time until the whole class has had an opportunity to experience this. Through the teacher's modeling, the students begin to incorporate correct usage and spelling in their own writing (Gambrell, 1985).

Literature Log: In this type of journal, children write their reactions and responses to something they have read. It may be a particular story or a chapter of a longer book that the child is reading independently or one that's being read aloud to them. In turn, the teacher can write a response as an extension of what the student has expressed (Harste & Short, 1988).

Walking Journal: This type of journal is similar to Dialogue Journals, but it is more public. In a Walking

Journal, students write about issues of interest to them as a class. For example, they may discuss a class project or event. The Journal is passed around from person to person including the teacher, and everyone writes her response to the issue (Harste & Short, 1988).

Learning Log: A Learning Log can be used as a form of Journal writing. In a Learning Log, a student reflects on what she has learned from a particular lesson or activity during the day. The students can either comment on what they've learned or how they learned the information. In addition to helping the students focus on their experience, Learning Logs provide information for teachers and parents about what the students are truly learning (Harste & Short, 1988).

In addition to students writing in their Journals, they should also be permitted to draw in the them. Often times, drawing enhances a child's writing and/or comprehension of reading material.

## PICTURE SETTING

Developed by: Stephen Kucer and Carolyn Burke

Concept: This strategy helps a student recall some



personal experience that they can write about. By drawing on students' past experiences, we help them realize that they can write and that we value what they have to say.

### Materials

- \* magazines, poster board, construction paper, writing paper
- \* crayons, markers, pencils
- \* scissors, glue, stapler or tape

Before starting this strategy, teachers should review the terms setting, characters, and plot with their learning disabled students to make sure they understand this vocabulary.

### Procedures

1. Students are instructed to look through magazines at home for a picture that reminds them of some experience that occurred in their lives. The picture should not contain people or animals. It should be a background that provides the setting for the story. If a student does not bring in a picture from home, the teacher can either cut out extra pictures ahead of time or can provide magazines in class

for the student to locate a picture. It is valuable for the student to at least try to find her own picture. If the student begins to get frustrated, then the teacher should offer some assistance. After the students find their pictures, they glue them onto a piece of poster board.

2. Next, the students are told to think of the characters that they want to have in their stories. The teacher explains that they should be thinking about what their characters look like, what type of people they are, what they are wearing, etc. Then, the students are instructed to draw their characters using the construction paper or regular paper. After they make the characters, the students cut them out, so they can physically move them around when they talk about their ideas for their stories.
3. When the students are finished creating their characters, the class will divide up into small groups, and each student will discuss her beginning ideas for her story. By this time, the students have already made a lot of choices and decisions prior to writing.

4. Following this, the students are given ample time to write their stories.
5. After a considerable length of writing time, the teacher would ask the students to share what they have written thus far and how they plan on finishing the story.
6. Next, the students are given time to complete their stories. The students who are finished should move on to another activity.
7. When the students have finished writing their stories, they should have an opportunity to read them to the class.

This strategy may easily take a couple days to complete depending on how the teacher structures her day. Once again, children with learning difficulties often times need time to develop their thoughts and ideas. For instance, it might take certain students a little while to think of the characters they want to include in their story.

Also, the teacher should be participating in all parts of this strategy right along with her students. It is very important that the students realize the teacher values this activity and that all writers go through a similar process.

### Extension Activities/Variations

1. After the students write their stories, they can retell the stories by acting them out using their settings and characters.
2. If some students have difficulty finding a picture that reminds them of a personal experience, they can look for settings they think will be good for the background of a fictional story.
3. Rather than drawing the characters, the students can make puppets to represent their characters.
4. After all the students have written their personal stories, the class can make a class book of settings that can be available for the students to use to write additional stories in the future.
5. Rather than finding a picture for the setting of their stories, the students can find pictures of people and objects to represent their characters. Then, they can draw their settings.
6. Also, this strategy can be used to develop reading fluency. A student's fluency can improve by practicing something she has

personally written, because the student is familiar with the language.

## STORY SETTING

Developed by: Katharine Busch as an adaptation of  
Picture Setting

Concept: This strategy uses literature to demonstrate to students how language is used to create a mood or setting. In addition, it provides a starting point for their own writing.

## Materials

- \* one copy of any literature book--ex. The Knight and the Dragon by Tomie de Paola
- \* paper and pencils

## Procedures

1. The teacher reads the beginning of a story to provide the students with a setting. The teacher has the book, but she does not show it to the students.
2. The teacher can use any book she wishes.
3. For example, from the above selection the teacher would read the following to the

students:

"Once upon a time, there was a knight in a castle who had never fought a dragon. And in a cave not too far away was a dragon who had never fought a knight" (p. 1).

4. After reading this portion, the teacher instructs the students to write a story based on this setting.
5. When the teacher first introduces this strategy, she may want to do some brainstorming with the whole class so that the students who find this difficult have some idea of how they could possibly begin. After they have used Story Setting a few times, they should be able to do it on their own.
6. After the students are finished writing their stories, the teacher shows them the published book, and they can compare their stories with the published version.
7. Following this, the teacher should display her students books with the published one.

### Extension Activities/Variations

1. The students can think of a title for the book that they think would match the setting. Then after they see the real book, they can see whose title was the closest to the published version.
2. Instead of the teacher reading a passage from a published book that describes the setting, she can read a segment that provides a description of the characters. Then, the students can write a story based on this information.
3. Story Setting can also be used to develop reading fluency. Once again, the student is familiar with the language, because she personally writes the story.

### GENERATING WRITTEN DISCOURSE--GWD

Developed by Stephen Kucer

Concept: This strategy focuses on helping the student formulate and organize major ideas for writing.

### Materials

- \* large pile of small index cards
- \* paper and pencils

- \* large, clear surface on which to lay out the cards

### Procedures

1. Each student is given five index cards and is asked to write down five different topics that she think she could write about that day. Encourage the students to think of topics that they think they know a lot about. It could be a hobby, something they learned about at some point, a past experience, etc. Some students will struggle with this and feel as though they don't know enough about any particular topic. The teacher should assist these students by drawing on her knowledge about them to help the students realize what topics they do have considerable knowledge about already.
2. During this time, the students can informally share their ideas with each other. Sometimes, this helps generate additional ideas.
3. Next, the students choose one of the five ideas that they want to write about that day. The other four ideas are written on a piece of paper and put in their writing folders for



future reference.

4. Now, the students are instructed to think of five major ideas for their topics that they may want to include in their stories. Each idea is written on a separate card and placed below the topic idea.
5. After this, the students are instructed to think of two details for each major idea. Each detail is written on a separate card and placed near the corresponding major idea.
6. When the students have finished writing down the details, they lay out all the cards on a large surface, so they can see the order of their ideas. At this point, the students can change the order of any their ideas by simply moving the cards around. This helps the students organize their thoughts and make mental revisions prior to writing.
7. It is important for the teacher to inform the students that they do not have to use all their original ideas. They may wish to save certain ones for later, or they may choose to disregard certain ideas all together. If the students want to add ideas, they should be encouraged to do so.

8. The purpose of the detail cards is to help the students recall what they want to write when they actually begin to compose their stories. Therefore, the ideas can be written down in various forms. Some may just be words or phrases while others may be complete sentences.
9. If the students are having difficulty with any of these steps, allow time to share after each step. In doing this, the students have the opportunity to see how others are developing their thoughts and ideas. In turn, it may help the students who are struggling to think of some new ideas.
10. When the student has her cards arranged in the order that she thinks is best, the student begins writing. During the writing process, the student may delete or add ideas at any time.
11. When the students are finished writing their rough drafts, they should be given the opportunity to share them with the class.

Once again, the teacher should be writing along with her students this whole time. It is important that the students see the teacher's writing evolve through this same process.

### Extension Activities/Variations

1. If the students find it too difficult to think of five topics that they can write about on a particular day, cut it down to three topics. This may be all they can handle in the beginning.
2. Rather than individuals writing stories, the teacher can group the children into groups of three or four and have the students organize a group story.
3. The teacher can connect this strategy with some topic or subject that the class is studying. This way, the students get to express what they have learned through their own creativity.
4. The teacher can choose a central theme such as Christmas customs. Then, the students can share their family customs through their stories. The class can share their stories with other classes as well.
5. GWD can also be used to develop reading fluency for the same reasons as the previous two strategies.

## WRITTEN CONVERSATION

Developed by: Carolyn Burke

Concept: Even though there are differences between oral language and written language, what students know about oral language can help them in their writing.

Written Conversation provides an informal means for people to communicate and use written language. The informality of this strategy is especially beneficial for students with learning difficulties, because it helps them overcome their insecurities about expressing themselves through writing. It is a natural activity that they can feel comfortable doing at any time.

### Materials

\* paper and pencils

### Procedure

1. When the teacher introduces this strategy, it is very important for her to inform the children that Written Conversation is just like oral conversation, except that the students will write down what they want to communicate rather than verbalize it.
2. The students are divided up into partners. The teacher will also pair up with one student.

3. One student in each pair writes down any question she wants and passes the paper to her partner.
4. The partner reads the question, writes a response, and passes it back to the first person. The first person either responds to her partner's reply, or she writes a new one. The strategy proceeds in this manner with the students switching roles in asking questions and writing responses until one of the partners ends the conversation.
5. One of the advantages of this strategy is that the teacher and a student can carry on a conversation without disturbing the other students in class. Similarly, students can have appropriate and necessary conversations among themselves without bothering others who may normally be distracted.
6. If the teacher is working with young children whose writing is at the nonconventional stage, the students who wrote the messages would also read it to their partners.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. Written Conversation can be used as a

comprehension strategy as well. It works beautifully as a literature response activity. After the students have read a story or text, they can express their reactions to it through Written Conversation. The interaction between partners can result in students gaining new insights and understanding.

2. A teacher could set aside a certain period at the end of each day for the children to engage in Written Conversation as a means of reflecting on the day's activities and happenings.

#### MESSAGE BOARD

Developed by Carolyn Burke

Concept: A Message Board provides opportunities for students to engage in literacy activities that are both meaningful and functional. "Through the process of sending and receiving messages, readers and writers, particularly young or inexperienced ones, come to understand that literacy is a multimodal communicative process. It helps learners understand that written language as well as oral language involves social interaction" (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988, p. 309).

## Materials

- \* bulletin board
- \* sufficient supply of paper--can be various sizes
- \* envelopes or library card pockets
- \* writing instruments
- \* thumbtacks or push pins

## Procedures

1. Message Boards can serve various purposes, and there are various ways of beginning them.
2. Various types of messages can be posted on the Message Board by both teachers and students such as: personal messages, schedules of events, assignments, general announcements, student acknowledgements, current events, etc.
3. The teacher can begin a Message Board by writing a general message to all the students, or she can write each student an individual message. The teacher then invites the students to write their own messages to each other.
4. The messages can be hung publicly or sealed in envelopes. Generally, the only restriction is that the messages be signed. However, sometimes it is also necessary to state

that nasty or negative messages can not be written.

5. One way of starting a Message Board is to hang a library card pocket up for each student with her name on it. This tends to boost the student's self-esteem and encourages a student to write to several people. Be sure to hang one for the teacher and any other helpers in the classroom.
6. If the students start to lose interest in the Message Board, the teacher should demonstrate new uses for it. For example, she may compliment a student on a new accomplishment.

#### Extension Activities/Variations

1. If the teacher wants a more structured board, she can divide it into designated sections such as: current events, personal messages, academic news, etc.
2. The teacher could write the students a general message each day calling it the Morning Message. This way the students could look forward to reading at least one message each day.
3. To boost a special needs student's self-esteem,



the teacher could designate one section of the Message Board for compliments only. Both the teacher and the students could acknowledge other students in this section.

4. A section of the Message Board could be connected to whatever unit of study the class is involved in at any given time.

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